

## The Language Policy in Iraqi Kurdistan Region from the Perspective of Spolsky's Theories

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### ABSTRACT

Social, cultural, religious and political forces are four complex factors that generated language policy. Taking this in his consideration, Bernard Spolsky presents his first theory in which he assumes that national ideology, English spread in the process of globalization, a sociolinguistic situation of a nation's attendant, and the internationally growing interest in the linguistic rights of minorities are four co-occurring conditions the language policy of any independent nation is driven by. Meanwhile, this paper tries to examine non-linguistic pressures on language management in Iraqi Kurdistan in an effort to test the second model of Spolsky's language policy through showing whether the effects of previous Iraqi Ba'ath Regime continue to show up even after the uprising of 1991 or not. The last component is what Spolsky calls self-management, an individual who modifies his or her language repertoire usually by learning a new language. It accounts for private language schools, and the way that some parents hire tutors for their children. It is assumed that in the case of Kurdistan it is likely to be the nonlinguistic problems that interfere with working out a satisfactory language policy. Accordingly, this paper finds that most of the linguistic and non-linguistic factors indicated by Spolsky's theories have driven in one way or another Kurdish language policy.

**Keywords:** English Spread, Language Policy, Minority Linguistic Rights, Non-linguistic, Theory, Sociolinguistics.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Language policy which takes the role of an interdisciplinary discipline is in close and direct contact with social sciences. Hereby, the national language policy of each nations is found to be the consequences of the complex interaction of political, cultural, religious, educational and economic domains (Spolsky and Shohamy, 2000: 1-42). While Spolsky considers the time language policy came into existence, he (2004: 75) proposes that four fundamental and co-existing factors will motivate the language policy of modern independent nation states. The four proposed factors are national ideology, the role of English as a global language, a nation's sociolinguistic situation, and an increasing interest in the rights of linguistic minorities. In an answer and as a sort of reaction to what Spolsky (2004, 133) himself proposes in terms of this theoretical model which

he finds it necessary to be tested against actual cases, this paper tries to introduce Iraqi Kurdistan as a tempting and actual case.

Though the beginning of Kurdish literature is difficult to date (Blau, 1996: 21), both ancient and modern language matters are specifically related to current language policy in one way or another in the Kurdish community which has remained passionately engaged in the its language management since the age (succession) of Amawi (Tofiq, 2007: 9) since the process of Arabization goes back to that time and the Kurdish elite wrote in the languages of their overlords but creative poets were the first to use Kurdish, their mother tongue, in their work. The first known literary masterpieces that depicted and made the Kurdish language a symbol of collective identity, a marker of the identity of the Kurdish people emerged in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, when Kurdistan was then the central point of the greed of its powerful neighbors. At the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the poet and philosopher Ahmed Khani framed the idea that the Kurds were a distinctive people, in his *Mam u Zin* (Blau cited in Jabar and Dawod, 2006: 103); (Khaznadar, 2010). Accordingly, literature was one of the valuable points that were the column of language which preserved it from fading and getting extinct. That is, Kurdish literature is the best example which worked as a strong support for language. (Pakhshan, 2013: 168)

Notably, the Kurdish language was probably the strongest means through which Kurdish nation identity is kept and the Kurdish language is not melted into Arabic language just like other languages such as the languages of the minorities found before the establishment of the current Arab nation states (Tofiq, 2007: 9); (Pakhshan, 2013: 146). As far as the emergence of nationality (national feeling) in the Kurdish literature (especially in the Kurdish poetry) is concerned, one can say that most of the Kurdish poets talked about nationality but some of them focused more on such feeling (sense), for instance, Ahmadi Khani is well-known for his poetry in which the sense of nationality is clearly seen. After the war of Chalderan and the division of Kurdistan, the ideology of Kurdayati (nationality) was found in the Kurdish poetry in a new style. One of those who wanted to insert the ideology of nationalism into his poetry was Khani. The second part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century witnessed the emergence of (Haji Qaderi Koyee) who completed what Khani started until he reached the top. The two orientations that Khani and Haji initiated in two different ages paved the way for being a school which guided other poets to adopt the same steps. Talking about Khani and Haji doesn't indicate that other poets didn't appear. There were definitely many other poets who talked about nationality in their poetries. (Mustafa, 2006)

Today, language policy discourse is more essential to up-to-date Iraqi Kurdistan sociolinguistic situation, and it is found to work on the improving the Iraqi Kurdistan's linguistic homogeneity. Further, Kurdish besides Arabic is the formal language of the region (Bengio, 2012: 16); (Jambaz, 2014: 18) and Sabir (2011: 30) in addition to Talabany (2013: 65-102). To be to the point, Spolsky's discussions displays that Kurds are not counted in Iraqi Kurdistan as a monolingual nation since other minorities have been coexisted long ago.

## 2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study takes into its account the aforementioned factors of Spolsky's theory besides the non-linguistic pressures on language management as well as self-management of an individual who modifies his or her language repertoire usually by learning a new language and analyzed their relevance to current Kurdish language policy so as to conclude as to whether, and if so, how, these

factors and components of these three different theories have motivated Kurdish language policy. Accordingly, the adopted approach is qualitative since the language and language policy situation in Iraqi Kurdistan Region including books, book chapters, journal articles, theses and unpublished literature composing both primary and secondary literatures are reviewed. Though the official form of language policy as a sociolinguistic branch doesn't go back to an old age, particular attention was given to recent discussions by prominent scholars of Kurdish language policy and Kurdish sociolinguistics generally, including Tofiq (2007); Nawkhosh (2010, 2013); Sabir (2008) and others like Jambaz (2014) with their comprehensive works and monographs of language in Kurdish. Meanwhile, this study also depends on primary sources that provided direct insights to, and evidence of Kurdish language policy, including government and government funded websites (e.g., the Ministry of Education, Higher Education and Scientific Studies, and the Academic Institute for Kurdish Studies), and news media with stories, editorials and opinions relevant to language policy discourse. Although the research was limited to sources available in Kurdish, scholarship in Kurdish sociolinguistics and Kurdish language policy information is commonly available in Kurdish, English, and Arabic a little bit.

Notably, this study tackles three supplementary theories in which four distinct components besides other nonlinguistic pressures that affect the community and the individuals in Iraqi Kurdistan community are explored. In a word, this paper is an effort to arrive at a systematic and critical analysis of each determinant in the Kurdish context after considering and tackling Spolsky's national language policy theories and his definition of what language policy comprises.

### **3. SPOLSKY'S THEORIES**

#### **3.1 SPOLSKY'S FIRST THEORY**

For Spolsky (2009: 1) the following four common and co-existing forces drive language policies at the national level:

- national (or ethnic) ideology or claims of identity;
- the role of English as a global language;
- a nation's sociolinguistic situation; and
- an increasing interest in linguistic rights within the human and civil rights framework.

As far as the first factor is concerned, beliefs and principles related to a collective psyche that may appear in language policy mainly depend on the first factor of Spolsky's theory, i.e. national ideology and identity. To be to the point, language is one of the principles of national security, for example, many nations of the south part of Arabian gulf peninsula, Sham, and North Africa got extinct due to the process of Arabization. Consequently, they lost their countries and lands as they lost their languages. They are all known as Arabs now and their countries become part of the Arab state. Thus, the national security of Kurdistan is restricted to the strength of language (Hamid and Raza, 2013: 116); (Fattah, 2007: 7); (Pakhshan, 2013: 161). On one hand, the idea and the struggle for saving the Kurds from the national oppression through uniting all parts of Kurdistan in an independent Kurdistan state is what is known by Jukil (2014: 8-9) as Kurdayeti, on the other hand, Kurdish is a genuine medium through which the Kurdish ethnic identity is expressed and it is an important criterion that differentiates them from their neighbors nationally and ethnically (Blau,

2006: 111); (Jukil, 2014: 7). Accordingly, the ancient history and proto-national identity reveals the significance of language to the national identity in Kurdistan. Kurdistan's political culture from the twelfth through the nineteenth century answers the essential question as to whether there existed a Kurdish nationalism in the modern sense of the term during that period. (Aziz, 2015: 45)

The second factor revolves around the role of English as a global language which is embodied by the impression given by Spolsky (2004: 220) when he assumes that the 'tidal wave of English' is moving into almost every sociolinguistic repertoire throughout the global language ecology. Though the history of the journey of English in Kurdistan is not a long one, Iraqi Kurdistan Region is not excluded. English which is the universal communication language plays a crucial role in terms of the current international social and economic movements and changes. As a matter of fact, the colonial rule in the past wasn't the key player for spreading English in Iraqi Kurdistan. Nevertheless, it seems that the Ministry of Education in Iraqi Kurdistan has practically started its first steps towards giving the priority to English as a second language in Iraqi Kurdistan since the language of education is changed from Kurdish into English and as empirical samples the process is currently in place for the first three stages. That is, as a language polity but without being studied, the Ministry of Education is adopting the steps of other locations and states such as Netherlands which insistently prioritizes English as a second language (L2) (Ytsma, 2000: 228). Nevertheless, the consequences of such a step has an adverse consequence the Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Government is to be aware of because the tidal wave of English is a great threat for the local languages. Surkhi (2013: 49) confirms that learning the second language without paying attention to the mother tongue will lead the Kurdish language to a kind of committing suicide or the slow death. Hereby, the status or vitality of local languages are protected in different ways all over the world. For example, discourse in Germany indicates that there is a boiled worry about English. Hence, one can find a lot of debates in terms of marginalization of German (Phillipson, 2003: 80). In a word, despite of the confirmation of the growth and development of the modern national language, and of the facilities that enable English language to be superior in Iraqi Kurdistan, in a statistics made by Aziz (2015: 141-143) among a group of students of Salahaddin University in terms of the attachment and loyalty to Kurdish, Arabic, and English languages. The students were basically from College of Science and College of Arts. In conclusion 90 per cent of the students agreed that the priority is to be given to Kurdish and this was a vigorous finding.

The third factor deals with sociolinguistic situation which revolves around the number and kinds of languages, the number and kinds of speakers of each, the communicative value of each language both inside and outside the community being studied (Spolsky, 2004: 219). Though apparently supporting dialects and sub-dialects is a threat which may divide language and melt the nation (Hamid and Raza, 2013: 117-118); (Nawkhosh, 2010), the dialects are to be served to make use of them for having a standard language and to adopt the same method of Arabic Kufa school where they discussed and investigated dialects so as to arrive at the rules and fix these rules in the Arabic standard language later on. Accordingly, the project of formal languages, which is prepared by two lawyers and two linguists, is the only project which is forwarded to Kurdistan Parliament in Kurdish in an effort to preserve Kurdish language from the threats Kurdish language encountered them. (Jambaz and et al, 2012: 5-19)

In fact, until the 1920s Kurdish classical poets and literate Kurds, like all non-Arab Muslim peoples of the region, used the Arabo-Persian alphabet. After the First World War, Kurds in Iraq attempted to Latinize their alphabet. Today Kurdish is written mainly in three scripts: Arabic, Latin and Cyrillic. Surkhi (2013: 24) believes that the principal way to preserve any language from

getting changed is through recording it in a written form. The efforts to Kurdicise the Kurdish language by removing all formal and lexical borrowing from the dominant languages is to be credited to the authors of the period 1920-60 (Blau, 1996: 23) cited in Kreyenbrock & Allison (1996). After the 1990s an entire institutional network of printing presses, publishing houses, newspapers, magazines and literary societies was created outside the purview of the previous Iraqi state. It was through this venue that a new approach and modern standardized language was given shape (Aziz, 2015: 42). Likewise, after the 1990s the means of new technological communications played a significant role in Kurdish national aspirations. On one hand, technology rapidly fills the gaps of life and adds many new terms and words to various dictionaries and enrich them. This is a positive point which is carried out as a consequence of development but this has also a negative impact on the native language and weakens the humanitarian feeling (Hamad, 2013: 137), on the other hand, the Kurdish-language education system operating in southern Iraqi Kurdistan made an enormous contribution to Kurdish studies by creating an intellectual elite operating from within 'Kurdistan' rather than from the diaspora, but it was unable to cater for speakers of minority dialects and the political situation made it vulnerable to interruption and government interference. Throughout their history, any serious study of Kurdish culture cannot afford to ignore the oral traditions. (Allison, 1996: 29-30) cited in Kreyenbrock & Allison (1996)

The increasing global interest, Spolsky (2004: 220) states to be found, in linguistic pluralism and an acceptance of the need to acknowledge the rights of individuals and groups to go on using their own languages is the final factor of his first theory. It seems that it is due to the influential role of the linguistic rights that made Spolsky (2005: 2152-2164) especially recall the international awareness of minority issues the American civil rights movement and twentieth century international human rights instruments spark and affirm to protect language minorities either explicitly or implicitly. Being counted as an element of human rights, language spurs nations to provide their minorities with language rights such as provisions for minority language-medium schooling in some way (Spolsky, 2004: 113). This is indeed the case, for example, for speakers of Turkman, Assyrian, and Arman minorities in Iraqi Kurdistan Region (Jambaz, 2014: 133)

On the level of Iraq, the rights of Kurds and minorities is kept safe in the rule of mother tongue. According to the first item of article 4 of the Iraqi Constitution in (2005) both Arabic and Kurdish languages are two formal languages in Iraq. Likewise, all other ethnic groups of Iraq have their rights to use their own languages in the educational institutions such as Turkmani, Syriac and Armenian languages. The fourth item of the Iraqi constitution in 2005 which is the only lawful texts on the international level which recognizes the Kurdish language as a formal language. Accordingly, the final factor of Spolsky's theory assumes that nations pay necessary attention to developing and implementing indulgent language rights for their minorities.

Educational System in Kurdistan covers minorities' rights in education such as Turkmani, Assyrians and Arabs. Aftermath Kurdish uprising in March 1991, for the first time the minorities of Turkmans and Assyrians gained their rights in Education and their languages became medium of instruction. Since the previous Iraqi Ba'ath regime put Turkmani and Syriac languages in the corner of domestic function and forced their users to change their real nationality into Arabs through many channels. Concerning Syriac language, the Iraqi Ba'ath regime had attempted to put in the corner of religious function only. But after the Kurdish uprising of March, 1991, Turkmani and Syriac languages gained their real status as native language for Turkmans and Assyrians respectively. For the first time some primary schools for Turkmani and Syriac were opened in the areas where the majority of population are Turkmani or Syriac speaker. By the academic year

2001-2002 Turkmani and Syriac schools has expanded (Jukil, 2005: 39-40). Further, the range of the expansion of Turkmani and Syriac schools has increased. That is, the number of Turkmani has increased by 30 schools and the number of Syriac schools has increased by 62 schools (Jambaz, 2014: 133, 137).

As an example for the impacts of migration and crossing the language and national limit, the education system in different states paved the way for many education languages of the schools. Actually, the existence of minorities groups in the societies of indigenous people and new migrated groups made the education insert Kurdish language into the working plan of such countries. There are Turkman private schools in the Iraqi Kurdistan cities which enable the Turkish language to accommodate itself step by step. The ChouEIFAT private English school enables the Kurdish school to get mixed with English more and exchange more terms and words with such a language. Such exchanges among the languages that are like twins are in a continuous movement though negative points are expected if they are not dealt with consciously. (Pakhshan, 2013: 143)

Accordingly, there are rights and requests minorities groups are demonstrating in many parts of the world for the sake of practicing their languages and they submitted requests for studying their languages at schools or they asked for opening private schools in this respect. Sabir (2009: 33)

However, Kurd was most illustratively framed as a minority when the point is about Microsoft and Kurdish-language software. Iraqi Kurdistan is to view this as a disastrous imposition of supranational language policy on a minority. Definitely, this confirms the position of this factor of Spolsky's first theory and the interconnect relation it has with the three other forces of the theory. Accordingly, it seems so far that linguistic minority rights have informed Kurdish language policy in Iraqi Kurdistan.

### **3.2 SPOLSKY'S SECOND THEORY**

The relevant part of the addition to Spolsky's theory concentrates on non-linguistic pressures on language management in Portuguese and French colonies after independence. The gist of the theory revolves around the non-linguistic factors and the effects of colonialism or any other forces that controlled a nation and continue to show up even after independence. Iraqi Kurdistan which is a state within a state (Bengio, 2012: ix) faced many internal and external obstacles as at the first moment of Iraq's transition to a colonial state (Natali, 2005: 26) till the beginning of the twenty-first century when Kurds had cast off the sorry image and witnessed a profound transformation.

Iraqi Kurdistan won or were granted independence from Iraqi Ba'ath regime in 1991 but it was left with social, economic, political, and linguistic problems which were the outcomes of the previous planned politics of the previous regimes in Iraq. By 1957 Kurdish language was ignored in primary schools, for example, there was one Kurdish school in Arbil, (The First Hawler school), all the remaining schools were Arabic; in Bahdinan, formal education was considered a taboo. In Kirkuk, schools did not accept Kurdish books but they returned them back to the ministry. At a time, even singing in Kurdish was prohibited in schools in Sulemania, and they attempted to get rid of Kurdish education, this was in boys' schools, whereas all girls' schools were taught in Arabic (Nebez, 1957:41-42). The same procedures continued after Ba'ath regime came to power in 1968 till 1991 but in a different way. For instance, the Ba'ath regime planned to forbid the Kurdish language through preventing it from being the language of education; according to their plan, they

wanted to start from the academic year 1990-1991, but they failed (Jambaz, 2014: 317, 318). In a word, Spolsky (2018: 62-97) tries to convey in his second theory that non-linguistic forces prevent or handicap severely the implementation of the language policy. Most of the states in Africa and the Americas and the Pacific continued the colonial selection of the metropolitan language as sole official language, in Asia, local languages took over, and in North Africa, Arabization was attempted. Being one of the independent entities of the middle east, Iraqi Kurdistan tries to shape and establish a self-governing Kurdish entity having its own national language policy.

### 3.3 SPOLSKY'S THIRD THEORY

The third theory deals with what Spolsky himself calls self-management, an individual who modifies his or her language repertoire usually by learning a new language. It accounts for private language schools, and the way that some parents hire tutors for their children. In the case of Kurdistan it is likely to be nonlinguistic problems that interfere with working out a satisfactory language policy (Spolsky, 2018). The story of the private schools in Iraqi Kurdistan goes back to the monarchy period when many isolated efforts were made for spreading education in Kurdistan via opening private schools the most well-known of which are “Kashti Noah” founded by writer Najmaddin Mullah, and “Jamhiyat Zanisti Kurdi” “scientific society” founded by Ahmed Tawfiq for teaching the Kurdish language to the laborers in the evenings until 1937 when it was closed and the government (Mutasarif) of Sulemani withdrew its license later (Jukil, 2004: 113).<sup>[L<sub>SEP</sub>]</sup> Since that time none of the private schools were granted any license for opening in Kurdistan till 1997 when the phase of private education in the Kurdistan region resumed and got improved in the interest of the modern educational system under the auspice of the Ministry of Education of (KRG) Kurdistan Region Government. Due to the policies have been adopted by the Ministry of Education which encourages private sectors to take part in the education process in Kurdistan and to the impact of globalization, many private schools have been opened. Recently, a considerable wave of private contribution in education Iraqi Kurdistan experienced since it is likely to grow due to the support they got from the KRG which provided the private sectors with land and legal contribution.

**Parents that can afford sending their children to such private schools due to certain factors such as the modern technical instruments, and the curriculum which depends on English as the medium of instruction. Despite of the negative impression such schools have by the majority of the population since their fees are too expensive, many parents encourage their children to learn the second language through sending them to private schools or hiring tutors in this respect.**

### 4. CONCLUSION

This paper assumes that the Spolsky's four forces besides the most updated policies drive language policy in Iraqi Kurdistan in the way Spolsky envisioned. That is, national ideology, English as a global language, the sociolinguistic situation, and an internationally growing interest in linguistic minority rights besides non-linguistic pressures on language management in Iraqi Kurdistan as well as the efforts made by an individual to modify his or her language repertoire usually by learning a new language and what is accounted for in this respect is the private schools where the parents afford the tuitions of their children especially when they hire tutors for them. The priority is given to non-linguistic problems when it comes to the factors that interfere with

working out a satisfactory language policy in the case of Iraqi Kurdistan. Notably, Kurdish today is definitely the same language of the ancient forefathers. It is due to the rise of English as a global language that the people in Iraqi Kurdistan try enthusiastically to acquire English as their second language and it is due to English threat protectionist language planning measures to face English impact and preserve Kurdish. Thus, an interest in the rights of linguistic minorities to improve and utilize their native languages has informed Kurdish current language policy. Hence, the Kurdish situation doesn't consider domestic linguistic diversity as a threat. Anyhow, this study recommends/affirms keeping all four forces and finds it unnecessary to expand Spolsky's first theory in any way. Ultimately, this paper calls for the successful application of Spolsky's national language policy theories to illustrate national-level language management including the language beliefs and language practices which establish his full conceptualization of language policy and display dissimilarly in many levels of the language policy.

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